

His View: Terror linked to climate change, its solutions

By Al Poplawsky | Posted: Tuesday, December 22, 2015 12:00 am

As 2015 draws to a close we find ourselves dealing with two mounting, seemingly intractable problems - terrorism and climate change. Both problems threaten the very fabric of our civilized society and might be grounds for pessimism as we start a new year. This need not be so.

Worldwide, terrorist events have increased by five-fold since 9/11. The spending of thousands of lives and \$4.4 trillion by our country to invade and bomb nations harboring terrorists has not worked.

With climate change, average worldwide temperatures are approaching a 1.0 degree Celsius (1.8 Fahrenheit) rise since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, warmer than humans have ever experienced. Nine of the 10 hottest years on record are since the year 2000 - the last coldest year on record was 1909. The temperature is rising 10 times faster than ever before.

Are these two separate problems with separate solutions, or are they somehow linked?

One line of thought is that terrorism is a symptom of disaffected youth feeling a sense of hopelessness and unable to find a solution to their predicament within societal norms. They are then drawn to a false solution outside of societal norms - terrorism. Syria experienced the worst drought on record from 2007 to 2010 which caused massive, widespread crop failure, a mass migration of 1.5 million people from farming families to Syrian cities, and a doubling of food prices in a single year. A recent study concluded that this drought was between two to three times more likely to occur because of climate change, and was a factor in the violent Syrian uprising starting in 2011. The disaffected, unemployed migrant youth in the cities were ripe for the picking by ISIS, which arose during this period.

Droughts, rising sea levels, floods, acidifying oceans and other natural disasters are all increasing with climate change. These changing climatic conditions will displace more and more people - climate refugees - from their traditional homelands where historically they were able to make a living, to locations that are unprepared to provide them with gainful employment or hope for decent lives. It follows that unless we do something different, climate change will contribute to increased human suffering, political unrest and terrorism.



Dealing with climate change on the local level

Al Poplawsky

There is a solution that can help with both problems. Addressing climate change should also help to alleviate a contributing factor to terrorism. Switching from carbon-based fuels to non-polluting, sustainable fuels will reduce civilization's contribution of greenhouse gases to earth's atmosphere, slow the rate of climate change, and slow the displacement of people from their historical homelands to hopeless situations in overcrowded cities.

The results of the 2015 Paris Climate Conference are also a reason for hope. Nearly 200 countries agreed to provisions that will get us halfway to the goal of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, leaving us five years to get the rest of the agreement. One topic for discussion was a carbon fee assessed on fossil fuels to make up for the environmental damage done by their combustion. "Carbon fee and dividend," as proposed by the Citizens' Climate Lobby, would return all of these fees as dividends to American citizens. It is gaining acceptance in the U.S.

Elon Musk, one of the world's leading entrepreneurs, whose driving force is converting society to sustainable fuels, says CFD will cut in half the time it takes us to convert to clean, sustainable energy. The solutions are in sight and we are accelerating toward them. We just need the will to grab on to them and use them. Citizens' Climate lobby, political will - hope - for a livable world. Check it out.

Al Poplawsky, a University of Idaho research specialist, is active in the local CCL group.